

January 25, 2005

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VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Room TW-B204  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: CC Docket No. 96-45  
Written Ex Parte Presentation

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On behalf of the National Grange (the "Grange"), I am writing to highlight the importance of maintaining fair and equitable access to federal universal service support for eligible wireless carriers that serve high cost rural areas. The Grange is the oldest general farm and rural public interest organization in the United States. Founded in 1867, today Grange members are affiliated with 3000 local, county and state Grange chapters across the country. More than 70% of all local Grange chapters are located in communities of 5000 persons or less.

The Grange recognizes the importance of the Universal Service Fund (USF) to the public welfare, especially in rural communities. In rural America, there has been a lack of overall telecommunications service. Many small towns and rural communities are considered the end point of the "last mile" of telecommunications services. A major purpose of the USF is to help rural areas achieve parity in telecommunications services with the more densely populated areas of the United States. The Grange also believes that full and fair competition between wireless and wireline carriers promotes the delivery of state-of-the-art telecommunications services to rural populations.

Today, rural consumers are using more wireless long distance minutes than ever before. The Grange commends the FCC's commitment to promote competitive telecommunications markets on behalf of rural consumers. We urge the Commission to continue to focus on the interests of rural consumers during upcoming proceedings. The Commission must not be swayed by ill-defined arguments, which are fundamentally anti-competitive and detrimental to rural consumers' best interests.

Respectfully submitted,

*Leroy Watson,*  
Leroy Watson, Legislative Director  
National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry

cc: Honorable Michael K. Powell  
Honorable Kathleen Q. Abernathy  
Honorable Michael J. Copps  
Honorable Kevin J. Martin  
Honorable Jonathan S. Adelstein